

# Analyzing Primary Sources Activity

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## The Cold War Begins, 1945–1960

### “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” by George Kennan

#### Background

In the July 1947 edition of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, an article was published titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” It detailed the U.S. policy of containment against the Soviet Union. The article was signed “X.” As it turned out, “X.” was actually George F. Kennan, a member of the U.S. diplomatic service.

In 1946 while serving at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Kennan received a request from the State Department to provide information about Soviet foreign policy goals and designs. Kennan sent back an 8,000-word telegram detailing how the United States might best “contain” the Soviet’s ambitions. It was famously named the “Long Telegram,” and was the basis for the article in *Foreign Affairs*.

**Directions:** Read this excerpt from “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” Then answer the questions that follow.

Of the original ideology, nothing has been officially junked. Belief is maintained in the basic badness of capitalism, in the inevitability of its destruction, in the obligation of the proletariat to assist in that destruction and to take power into its own hands. But stress has come to be laid primarily on those concepts which relate most specifically to the Soviet regime itself: to its position as the sole truly Socialist regime in a dark and misguided world, and to the relationships of power within it.

The first of these concepts is that of the innate antagonism between capitalism and Socialism. We have seen how deeply that concept has become imbedded in foundations of Soviet power. It has profound implications for Russia’s conduct as a member of international society. It means that there can never be on Moscow’s side a sincere assumption of a community of aims between the Soviet Union and powers which are regarded as capitalist. It must inevitably be assumed in Moscow that the aims of the capitalist world are antagonistic to the Soviet regime, and therefore to the interests of the peoples it controls. If the Soviet government occasionally sets its signature to documents which would indicate the contrary, this is to be regarded as a tactical maneuver permissible in dealing with the enemy (who is without honor) and should be taken in the spirit of caveat emptor. Basically, the antagonism remains. It is postulated. And from it flow many of the phenomena which we find disturbing in the Kremlin’s conduct of foreign policy: the secretiveness, the lack of frankness, the duplicity, the wary suspiciousness, and the basic unfriendliness of purpose. These phenomena are there to stay, for the foreseeable future. There can be variations of degree and of emphasis.

# Analyzing Primary Sources

## Activity *Cont.*

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When there is something the Russians want from us, one or the other of these features of their policy may be thrust temporarily into the background; and when that happens there will always be Americans who will leap forward with gleeful announcements that "the Russians have changed," and some who will even try to take credit for having brought about such "changes." But we should not be misled by tactical maneuvers. These characteristics of Soviet policy, like the postulate from which they flow, are basic to the internal nature of Soviet power, and will be with us, whether in the foreground or the background, until the internal nature of Soviet power is changed.

This means we are going to continue for long time to find the Russians difficult to deal with. It does not mean that they should be considered as embarked upon a do-or-die program to overthrow our society by a given date. The theory of the inevitability of the eventual fall of capitalism has the fortunate connotation that there is no hurry about it. The forces of progress can take their time in preparing the final coup de grâce. Meanwhile, what is vital is that the "Socialist fatherland"—that oasis of power which has already been won for Socialism in the person of the Soviet Union—should be cherished and defended by all good Communists at home and abroad, its fortunes promoted, its enemies badgered and confounded. The promotion of premature, "adventuristic" revolutionary projects abroad which might embarrass Soviet power in any way would be an inexcusable, even a counter-revolutionary act. The cause of Socialism is the support and promotion of Soviet power, as defined in Moscow.

—"The Sources of Soviet Conduct," by X (George Kennan), 1947

#### Critical Thinking

1. How would you describe the tone Kennan has adopted? Provide an example that displays that tone.
2. How does Moscow view its economic prospects compared to those of the United States?
3. According to Kennan's analysis, what is the inevitable consequence of the "innate antagonism between capitalism and Socialism"?